

A
LETTER

FROM A
GENTLEMAN,

Residing in foreign Parts,

TO HIS
GODSON in *ENGLAND*,

Explaining to Him

AND

Enforcing the Obligations

OF HIS

BAPTISMAL COVENANT.

By y^e Revd Mr Wagsstaff.

LONDON:

Printed for W. OWEN at *Homer's Head* near
Temple-Bar, 1758.

[Price Four Pence.]

LETTER

FROM A

GENTLEMAN

Residing in foreign Parts

GODSON & CO. LTD.



Enforcing the Obligations

OF HIS

BAPTISMAL COVENANT.

LONDON:

Printed by W. Gower, 15, Abchurch Lane.

[Price Four Pence.]



A

LETTER &c.

24 January, 1757.

Dear SIR,



S I have never had the opportunity of seeing you since the day of your Baptism, nor consequently of discharging the office of a Godfather, which at that time I was prevailed with to take upon me in your behalf, I would willingly do it now, though somewhat later than I could wish ; and perhaps unnecessary on account of your good education and virtuous life, and the truly religious sentiments, which by the blessing of God, you may have imbibed. But as I am intirely in the dark as to your conduct and character, I know not how to

A 2

dispense

dispense with myself from putting you in mind of the obligations contracted by you in that holy Sacrament, and of the promises made by your Sponsors in your name on that solemn occasion: An office, which cannot but be extremely agreeable to you, if your mind be rightly disposed, and you love that comfortable name of a Christian, which you had the honour to receive at the Font; and which, if you have forgot, or neglected, or despised the privilege of this new and spiritual Birth, may be of use to awaken your mind to better thoughts, and conduct you in the only safe and secure paths that lead to happiness and immortality. When all mankind had forfeited their title to life and bliss by sin, God sent his own Son to redeem them, who instituted the Sacrament of Baptism, as the only means of applying the benefit of that redemption to them; whence it is, that he told Nicodemus, *except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*, John iii. 5. so that Baptism is necessary to Salvation, but yet not sufficient, unless the terms on which it is given, and the obligations attending it, be complied with by us, when we are at

an age to perform them. These terms and obligations are such as result from the nature of the Covenant entered into between Christ and the baptized persons in that holy Sacrament, wherein our blessed Saviour receives them into his favour, pardons their sins, confers upon them the Gift of his sanctifying Spirit, and constitutes them heirs of the kingdom of heaven; on condition, that they embrace the Gospel, maintain a firm faith in him to the end of their lives, and constantly obey the laws and precepts that he has given them. These conditions are the subject of those promises, which were made by your sureties on your behalf at the time of your Baptism, and it is incumbent upon you to perform them carefully, and fully discharge them; for otherwise your Baptism will be of no use to you, but to aggravate and increase your guilt, as a profaner of God's most sacred ordinance, a despiser of the highest instance of mercy vouchsafed to the sons of men, and a breaker of the most solemn vow that a creature can make to his Creator. Now the first thing promised in your name at your Baptism, was that you would *renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory*

glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so as not to follow, nor be led by them.

By *renouncing the Devil* is meant a refusal of all kind of commerce with him or his ministers, with soothsayers, and all pretenders to unlawful arts, and the foreknowledge of future events, so as not to apply to any of them for the discovery of a theft, or goods that are lost, for the cure of a distemper, or other relief in case of any disaster or affliction.

By *the works of the Devil* is understood every thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; all heresies, and what the libertine spirits of our age call Freethinking; all idolatry and superstition, and generally whatsoever tends to the disadvantage and destruction of Religion, to withdraw our minds from the duty we owe to God, and to propagate the Interests of the Prince of Darkness.

By *renouncing the vain pomp and glory of the world*, we oblige ourselves to abandon all ambitious views of wealth and grandeur,

deur, to be content with the station in which God has placed us, to be charitable to the poor, kind and benevolent to our neighbours, and serviceable to all such as stand in need of our assistance. But far remote from this temper is that, which disposes men to covet what belongs to another, to rob, to cheat, or over-reach their brethren, to usurp crowns, or support usurpers in the possession of that to which they have no right; to swear to unlawful governments; to pray for them in the publick offices by the stile and title of God's Ordinance, and to supplicate heaven for their success and prosperity in their unjust acquisitions. Nor is it consistent with our vow of renouncing the world to acknowledge and adhere to Schism, a sin so confessedly great and enormous, that we expressly pray to be delivered from it in the Litany of our Common-Prayer-Book. What Rebellion is in the State, the same is Schism in the Church, and therefore to be avoided with all imaginable zeal and care; so as to withdraw from the publick assemblies of all such as are involved in it, because, as the corresponding with Rebels is Rebellion, so the communicating with Schismatics is

Schism.

Schism. In short, by renouncing the world we bind ourselves to stifle all anxious and over-thoughtful solicitude for the pleasures and enjoyments of this life, so as to neglect no duty, nor commit any sin for the attaining them; we renounce all policy that is not consistent with honesty, all gain that is contrary to godliness, and every satisfaction that cannot be indulged with a good conscience.

By the *carnal desires of the flesh* is strictly and properly meant adultery and fornication, all uncleanness and obscenity in thought, word and action: Sins, which we ought to abhor and be afraid of to such a degree, as to flee from every temptation, and avoid every liberty, how fashionable soever it be, that may tend to kindle the least spark of an unlawful inclination in us; being always mindful of our blessed Saviour's words, that he who only *looks upon a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart*, Matth. v. 28. and of those of St. Paul, that *no whoremonger nor unclean person hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*, Ephes. chap. v. ver. 5. But possibly by the *desires of the flesh* we are to understand,

understand, not only every impure and brutal lust, but also all those vices that arise from the influence which our frail and corruptible part has over our mind; such as pride and envy, wrath and immoderate anger, strife and malice, gluttony and drunkenness, falsehood and deceit, vain-glory and hypocrisy, hatred, backbiting, murder, and other injurious treatment of our neighbour; and in a word every suggestion that is inconsistent with charity, meekness and temperance, and those other fruits of the spirit to which the Apostle opposes the works of the flesh in *Galat.* chap. v. ver. 19, 22.

The second thing promised in your name at your Baptism was, that you would *believe all the articles of the Christian Faith.* These articles are contained in the three Creeds that go under the name of the Apostles, the Nicene, and St. Athanasius, which are printed in our Common-Prayer-Book, and appointed to be used or repeated by every congregation; the first daily, the second on all Sundays and Holidays, and the last on the more solemn Festivals, and those of St. John Baptist, and several of the

Apostles, that is, thirteen times in the year. The substance of them is represented in brief in the Apostles Creed, but some particulars are more largely explained in the other two. They consist of three parts according to our Church's Catechism, the first of which teaches us *to believe in God the Father, who hath made us and all the world*; the second *in God the Son, who hath redeemed us and all mankind*; the third *in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth us and all the elect people of God*. But for a more thorough and easy comprehension of the whole, they may be divided into twelve heads, which I shall here put down in their proper order, adding to each of them a reference to the chapter and verse of the New Testament on which they are founded; whereby it may appear how properly this summary of our Faith is called the Apostles Creed, as being drawn from their Doctrine and Writings.

THE FIRST HEAD relates to the first person in the blessed Trinity, expressed in the words, *I believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth*; for which

See

See Matth. xxiii. 9. Acts iv. 24.
Ephes. iv. 6. Rev. x. 6. and xxi. 22.

THE SECOND HEAD relates to the second person of the blessed Trinity, expressed in the words, *and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord*; for which

See 1 John iv. 9. and Rom. v. 21.

THE THIRD HEAD relates to the incarnation and birth of Christ, expressed in the words, *who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary*; for which

See Matth. i. 16, 18, 20, 23, 25.
Luke i. 27, 31, 35. and ii. 7.

THE FOURTH HEAD relates to his passion, death and burial, expressed in the words, *suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried*; for which

See Matth. xxvii. 24, 26, 35, 50, 60.
Mark xv. 15, 24, 37, 46. Luke xxiii.
24, 33, 46, 53. John xix. 16, 18, 30,
42. Philipp. ii. 8. and 1 Corinth. xv.
3, 4.

THE FIFTH HEAD relates to his descent into hell, and his resurrection, expressed

in the words, *he descended into hell, the third day he arose again from the dead; for which*

See Acts ii. 27. Luke xxiv. 21. Acts x. 40. and 1 Corinth. xv. 4.

THE SIXTH HEAD relates to his Ascension and Glorification, expressed in the words, *he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty; for which*

See Mark xvi. 19. Luke xxiv. 51. Acts i. 9. Ephes. i. 20. and 1 Tim. iii. 16.

THE SEVENTH HEAD relates to the last judgment, expressed in the words, *from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead; for which*

See Acts x. 42. and 2 Tim. iv. 1.

THE EIGHTH HEAD relates to the third person of the blessed Trinity, expressed in the words, *I believe in the Holy Ghost; for which*

See Matth. xxviii. 19. Acts v. 3, 4. John xv. 26. and 1 Corinth. xii. 3.

THE

THE NINTH HEAD relates to the Church, and the Communion of all her members one with another, expresse in the words, *the holy Catholick Church, the Communion of Saints*; for which

See Ephes. v. 27. and chap. iii. 15. Heb. xii. 23. 1 John i. 3. Rev. v. 9.

THE TENTH HEAD relates to the doctrine of remission of sins, expresse in the words, *the forgiveness of Sins*; for which

See Matth. xxvi. 28. Luke xxiv. 47. Acts ii. 38. Rom. iii. 25. and 1 John i. 9.

THE ELEVENTH HEAD relates to the general Resurrection of all Mankind, expresse in the words, *the Resurrection of the Body*; for which

See Matth. xxii. 31. John v. 29. Acts xxiv. 15. and xxvi. 8. 1 Cor. xv. 22, 42 and 52. Philip. iii. 21. and 1 Theffal. iv. 14.

THE TWELFTH HEAD relates to the future state, expresse in the words, *and the life everlasting*; for which

See

See Matth. xxv. 46. John v. 29.
 Rom. ii. 7. and vi. 22. Titus i. 2.
 1 John ii. 25. and v. 13.

These heads of the Apostles Creed are some of them, as I said, more largely explained in the other two Creeds, as the Unity of the Godhead in a Trinity of persons, the divinity, incarnation, and prerogatives of Christ, the nature and operations of the Holy Ghost, and the unity and effects of Baptism. For whereas the three persons of the blessed Trinity are little more than mentioned and distinguished in the Apostles Creed, they are in that of St. Athanasius declared to be equal in Glory and Majesty, all eternal, uncreated, incomprehensible and almighty, so distinguished in their persons, that the Father is not the Son, nor either of them the Holy Ghost, and yet so undivided in substance, that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not three Gods but one God: and whereas in the Apostles Creed our blessed Saviour's divinity is left to be understood in the expression whereby he is called the Son of God; in the two other Creeds he is formally affirmed to be God, begotten of the Father
 I alone

alone before the worlds, or from all eternity, of one substance with the Father, and equal to him as touching his Godhead; and in the Nicene Creed it is particularly taken notice of, that all things were made or created by him, a point which is expressly attested by Scripture, as may be seen in John, chap. i. ver. 3, 10. Ephes. chap. iii. ver. 9. Coloss. chap. i. ver. 16. Heb. chap. i. ver. 2. So whereas his Incarnation of the Virgin Mary by the operation of the Holy Ghost is declared without any farther explication in the Apostles Creed, and only with the addition of the words, *and was made man* in the Nicene Creed, this mystery is more fully delivered in the Athanasian Creed, where he is said to consist of two natures, the divine and human, *being God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds, and man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world*; that his human nature is intirely the same with that of other men, consisting not only of flesh and blood, but also of a rational soul, *being perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting*: that these two natures are so united in him, as to constitute one only person;

person; *for although he be God and man, yet he is not two but one Christ*; and that his being one Christ is not owing to any change of the Divine into the human, or of the human into the Divine nature: For if the Divine was changed into the human nature, he would upon such change cease to be God; and if the human was changed into the Divine nature, he would cease to be man: but it is owing to an union of the Godhead with the Manhood in such manner, that both the natures continue distinct in their proper essences, without passing the one into the other, or being confounded and blended together; for he is *one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the Manhood into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.* And whereas in the Apostles Creed we profess to believe in the Holy Ghost without saying any thing more upon that article, we declare in the two others, that this Divine person proceeds from the Father and the Son, being neither created nor begotten, as it is in the Athanasian Creed; and in the Nicene Creed, that we originally receive our breath from him, and depend upon him for the

con-

continuance of it, as being *the Lord and Giver of Life*; that the same divine worship and supream honours are due to him as to the Father and the Son, and that the gift of prophecy was the effect of his inspiration, *who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets*. And lastly, whereas there is no mention made of Baptism in the Apostles Creed, and that of St. Athanasius (though the effect of it, *remission of sins*, is particularly specified in the Apostles Creed, and may be thought to be included in the article of *the Holy Catholick Church*, it being impossible for us to believe in the Holy Catholick Church without acknowledging Baptism, whereby we are admitted into it and made members of it) in the Nicene Creed, we not only declare our Belief of Baptism in general, but also that it is one only, to be received but once by the same person, and not repeated; and that by means of this sacrament all the sins committed before it are, through the Blood of Christ, who instituted it, pardoned and washed away.

The third and last thing promised by you in the persons of your sureties was, that you would *obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life.* This promise, which comprehends in it all the rest, is like an Oath of Fealty and Allegiance, whereby the promiser obliges himself to be faithful, diligent and sincere in every part of his duty, to observe all God's laws with the greatest exactness and zeal, to do whatsoever he has enjoined, and forbear every thing that he has forbidden, to keep a constant guard both upon his thoughts and actions, and to live, as much as possible, without offending him either by will, word or deed. But as a promise to obey God's commandments cannot be performed by one that knows not what those commandments are, therefore your sureties were exhorted at your Baptism to take care that you were taught what a solemn vow you had then made by them, and to call upon you to hear sermons, and to learn the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the ten Commandments with all other things necessary to be known and believed for your Soul's health. The first part of this exhortation

tation relating to your Baptismal Vow, is that, which I have hitherto been discouraging of: the other part relating to the means for enabling you to keep that vow is now to be spoken to. And though I cannot well doubt of your having learned the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the ten Commandments, and also the whole of that excellent Catechism in our Common-Prayer-Book, yet as I am a perfect stranger to your person, and way of living, I must not omit putting you in mind of the necessity you lie under, not only of learning, but also of understanding, and thoroughly digesting the matter and contents of those summaries of our religion. These rules and instructions, like the rudiments of human science, are taught us in our youth, but belong to every age, as they contain things which we are bound to believe and practise throughout the whole course of our lives; and which are therefore necessary to be learnt by every one that is ignorant of them, however advanced in years. He that desires to be saved, must believe and pray, and live conformably to the Will of God: But how is it possible for him to do this without knowing the several articles

of the Christian faith comprised in the Creed, being well acquainted with the model and rule of prayer given us by the mouth of the second Person in the Blessed Trinity, and laying up in his thoughts and memory the ten Commandments, written by the hand of God himself for our direction in the several duties we owe to him, to ourselves and to our neighbours? But the intire Catechism is also necessary to be learned, not only as it contains the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the ten Commandments, with a short and easy explication both of them and the Baptismal Vow, but also as the doctrine of both the Sacraments is therein clearly and largely delivered; and it is one part of the charge given by the Church to the Godfathers and Godmothers to take care that the baptised infant be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him, as soon as he can answer the questions in this Catechism, but not before. Now Confirmation being an Ordinance, wherein the confirmed persons taking upon themselves the promises made for them at their Baptism, receive by means of the Bishop's prayer, and the imposition of his hands, the gift of the Holy Ghost,

to

to confirm and strengthen them in the Christian warfare, it is highly proper that they should qualify themselves for the obtaining so great a blessing, by a thorough knowledge of, and instruction in the Catechism, which is the means appointed for that purpose by the Church; and the rather, because our Ecclesiastical Laws admit no one to the Holy Communion, before he is actually confirmed, or else ready and desirous to be confirmed.

If therefore you have not yet applied yourself seriously and maturely to the consideration of that solemn vow, which was made to God in your name at your Baptism; if you have not yet learned, and thoroughly comprehended the Church Catechism; if you have not qualified yourself by this means for receiving the Holy Spirit of God in Confirmation, nor have been admitted to the benefit of that sacred Ordinance by imposition of a Bishop's hands, I intreat you earnestly to do both the one and the other, and that without the least delay: For the short time we have to live, and the absolute uncertainty of the hour of our death calls for our immediate

diate care and diligence to prepare for another life, and secure our eternal interest. When we come to appear before the great Judge of mankind, we have nothing to plead in our favour but the merits of Christ, and no title to those merits but our Baptism. If then we have neglected to perform our part in the Baptismal Covenant, if we have taken no care to know and practise those duties, which are the indispensable conditions of that Covenant; if we have despised that sacred and solemn Vow, in virtue of which we were admitted to the Font, and trampled upon so tremendous a thing, as a promise made at a Sacrament instituted by our Redeemer for the Salvation of our immortal Souls, and to the Majesty of that God, who knows every thought and motion of our minds: I say, if we have acted in this careless, contemptuous and malicious manner, what answer shall we have to make for ourselves? that very thing which should justify us, will then be our condemnation. In vain shall we appeal to the Title of a Christian, which we have forfeited; in vain shall we claim the Privileges of a Baptism, that we have profaned and polluted:

luted: That salutary name, and those glorious privileges will serve to no other purpose, but to fill us with horror for our abuses of them, to aggravate our guilt, expose our ingratitude, and render us inexcusable. But God, of his infinite mercy, preserve us all from such a dreadful state of misery and despair, and give you in particular such a measure of his Grace, as may enable you to make a timely and effectual provision against it. For this reason, I would recommend to you two excellent Books, which you would do well to have, as I may say, always in your hands, and those are, *The whole Duty of Man*, and Mr. NELSON *on the Feasts and Fasts of the Church*: books which will fully instruct you in matters both of Faith and Practice, and serve to incite and prepare you for the discharge of your Baptismal Vow, if you have not yet done it; and, if you have, to improve and promote your progress in all Christian exercises, to render you fit for the Holy Communion, to persuade you to a frequent use of it, which is both the duty and delight of every perfect Christian; and to enable you, by the Grace of God, which

2

you

you must daily pray for, so to live here,
that you may be for ever happy hereafter.
This is my earnest desire for you, and the
only scope and view of this long Letter,
whereby I hope you will be abundantly
convinced how much I am,

Dear SIR,

Your affectionate Godfather,

And humble Servant.

N. B. Those who are truly desirous of
profiting by this excellent Piece of In-
struction, are earnestly exhorted dili-
gently and carefully to refer to, and
compare the several Texts cited under
the above Heads, particularly those re-
lating to the Creeds or Confessions of
our Faith. 6 AP 58